

White Paper Report

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The Albuquerque Museum Storage and Environmental Consulting Project

Project Director: Steven Pettit

Grantee Institution: Albuquerque Museum Foundation

In the fall of 2012, the Albuquerque Museum Foundation was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections planning grant. The grant addresses mechanical and storage needs for a newly constructed 9,500 square foot collections area of the Albuquerque Museum which will house major portions of the Museum's 33,000 works of art and historical artifacts, and the 125,000-image photograph archives. The grant funding allowed museum staff to collaborate with Objects Conservator Bettina Raphael of Southwest Conservation Laboratory in Santa Fe, and Mechanical Engineer Scott Fitch of Innovative Construction & Design Solutions, LLC, to produce two analytical reports assessing short-term, medium-, and long-range storage equipment needs for the museum's diverse and complex collections, and the HVAC mechanical systems requirements necessary for environmental conditions within the Museum facility. Participants also met with storage equipment vendors to create preliminary drawings based upon previous conservation surveys and the input of the consulting conservator and engineer, that will be refined in the latter portion of 2013 so that a clear strategy for installation of compacting storage equipment can be developed. A component of this process was the formulation of a realistic budget estimate for specialized storage enclosures required, so that budgeting for these purchases can be planned by Museum staff.

All project goals were accomplished. The project resulted in two reports and one collections storage layout. The reports identified 14 areas of concern and suggestions for short, medium and long term solutions, which will be a valuable asset to the Museum board and staff as they prioritize funding and staff workload. Museum staff is using this report as a planning tool in discussions with HVAC and storage equipment contractors. The Storage Assessment Report will provide a framework for preparing and prioritizing equipment needs related to the Museum's complex and diverse collections, and a concise justification for funding decisions at the administrative level. In addition, the museum Board and Foundation are exploring funding sources at the state, federal, and corporate levels for HVAC and storage upgrades. Improvegroup's storage equipment layout will provide the basis for continuing evaluation of collections content and refinement of strategies to house, document, and protect the museum's assets. In addition, these activities are helping the collections staff to plan for and address growth of the collection in a meaningful way.

Because of the nature of the project, with project activities focused on internal planning, audiences were limited to the Museum and Foundation Boards, museum staff, the consultants, and a potential corporate funder; about 80 individuals, during the project. After the project was completed, team members visited the storage facilities at the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe to inform staff about the grant project and compare

resulting storage layouts and long-term plans. The Museum will submit an article for the winter 2014 Foundation newsletter about the grant project and its results, sharing it with over 3,000 museum members, residents and out-of-town visitors, City of Albuquerque Cultural Services Department and City Hall administrators. Information about the project will be disseminated to the membership of the New Mexico Museum Association, with a membership of at least 500, including curators, conservators and administrators statewide. Conservator Bettina Raphael will share data from the project with fellow conservators including the American Institute for Conservation, the National Institute for Conservation, and Western Association for Art Conservation. Visits to the Museum's future storage areas, including visits from potential funders, are anticipated to be in the neighborhood of 300 to 400 within the next two years.

The project was evaluated for completion and quality by project director Steve Pettit, Curator of Collections, and team member Deb Slaney, Curator of History. Strengths of the project included having experienced consultants with a successful history of federally funded conservation grant projects; also with having Ms. Raphael who has a 30-year history of working with the museum on various City-funded conservation projects. The only weaknesses were difficulty with pulling staff together for group meetings due to understaffing, and the timing of the project relative to Phase II construction. However, we were able to meet the needs of the project through the willingness of the conservators to be flexible, and to be persistent in their reminders for group review and discussion of the final reports. Consultants Fitch and Raphael both excelled in these efforts. Also, staff selected for the project all are career museum professionals with decades of knowledge of conservation, storage and environmental issues, which contributed to the success of the project. In the next grant we would add the Museum preparators and Administrative Assistant to Art and History on the project staff, as well as the Foundation's newly hired Director of Development, and schedule consultants earlier in the construction sequence. The greatest success is that with these documents in hand, the Museum can now move forward with its goal to proceed with storage and HVAC upgrades in 2014.

Materials generated by the project will also be used for future fundraising efforts, with a goal to complete the upgrades within the next five to ten years. This project strengthened our relationships with the conservation community both nationally and statewide, and connected us more closely to collection managers and curators in the Museum of New Mexico network. We expect these new partnerships to expand as we continue to seek to provide the best care possible for the Museum collection.

The long-term impacts are many. Foremost will be the improved preservation of the Art, History and Photoarchives collections through state-of-the-art climate control and storage equipment. Second will be the long-term general preservation and maintenance of the collections in perpetuity and increased collections staff. Finally, the potential for the Museum to help guide and advise other city museums and other, more rural museums in our area in the practicalities of storage planning, fundraising, and grants management. All of this will have a long-term impact on the people of Albuquerque and the central Rio Grande Valley, who recognize the value of our history, and artistic heritage, and the role the Museum plays in celebrating that heritage.